

December 18, 2019

Hon. Shane Thompson
Environment and Natural Resources
Government of the Northwest Territories
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Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
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Via Email
Shane_Thompson@gov.nt.ca
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Grand Chief George Mackenzie
Tłıchq Government
Box 412
Behchokò, NT X1A 1Y0
Email: georgemackenzie@tlicho.com

Re: Diga Management Proposal

Dear Minister Thompson & Grand Chief Mackenzie:

On February 6, 2019, the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board submitted a predator management proposal to the Department of Environment & Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłıchq Government (TG), based on updated 2018 *Kòk'èetì ekwò* (Bathurst caribou) and *Sahtì ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) herd estimates and consultations with Tłıchq communities. The Board noted that predator management must begin by May 2019 in order to promote recovery of the herds and ensure potential for a future harvest of *kòk'èetì* and *sahtì ekwò*.

On March 7, 2019, the GNWT and TG responded to the Board's letter accepting most of the recommendations as well as identifying that a joint proposal on *Diga* (wolf) management would be developed. To date, no management proposal has been submitted to the WRRB. The Board encourages the GNWT and TG to submit a diga management proposal on or before January 31, 2020 so that it can be discussed during the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting on February 12-13, 2020. The WRRB will, in accordance with the Tłıchq Agreement, participate in any consultations on these proposals that the GNWT or TG decides to undertake.

If there are any questions, please contact our office at (867) 873-5740 or jpellissey@wrrb.ca.

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas
Chair

Attachments

Cc Erin Kelly, Acting Deputy Minister, ENR-GNWT
Brett Elkin, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, ENR-GNWT
Bruno Croft, Superintendent, North Slave Region, ENR-GNWT
Laura Duncan, Tłıchǫ Executive Officer, TG
Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director, Culture and Lands Protection, TG
Michael Birlea, Manager, Culture and Lands Protection, TG



February 6, 2019

Hon. Robert C. McLeod, Minister
Environment and Natural Resources
Government of the Northwest Territories
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Via Email
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Grand Chief George Mackenzie
Tłıchq Government
Box 412
Behchokò, NT X1A 1Y0
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Re: Section 12.5.6 of the Tłıchq Agreement – WRRB Predator Management Recommendations

Dear Minister McLeod & Grand Chief Mackenzie:

Background:

The *Kokèti Ekwò* (Bathurst caribou) and *Sahti Ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) herds are both in a precipitous decline. The decline of the *kokèti ekwò* herd was first documented in 1996 when the population was estimated at 349,000 animals, down from 420,000 in 1986. Management actions to date have failed to halt the decline and the herd's population was estimated at 8,200 animals in 2018. The decline of the *sahti ekwò* herd was first documented in 2013 when the herd's population was estimated at 68,000 animals, down from 121,000 in 2010. In 2018, the herd's population was estimated at 19,000 animals.

Range management, harvest restrictions and intensive study are being implemented or are already occurring in Wek'èezhìi for both herds. Previous joint management proposals for the *kokèti ekwò* herd by the Department of Environment & Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłıchq Government (TG) resulted in the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) holding public hearings in 2010 and again in 2016. A public hearing was also held to address management proposals for the *sahti ekwò* herd in 2016.

On January 14 and January 22, 2019 respectively, the WRRB received joint management proposals for the *sahti ekwò* and *kokèti ekwò* herds. These management proposals propose a number of actions. However, despite WRRB recommendations for the implementation of predator control dating as far back as 2010, neither of the current management proposals includes a plan for predator management in either the *sahti ekwò* or *kokèti ekwò* ranges. Instead your governments have indicated their intention to address the control of predators, more specifically *Dìga* (wolves), in a separate joint management proposal later in the spring of 2019.

The Issue:

The situation for both of these herds is dire. Analysis of the joint management proposals by the Board and its advisors indicates an immediate need for action to reduce predation on the herds. During its 2016 public hearings and most recently in the TG-ENR *Ekwò* (barren-ground caribou) consultation tours, conducted on January 21-23, 2019, the WRRB has heard from the community members that dìga are continuing to put pressure on ekwò populations. Community members would like to see action taken now. The Board agrees.

The Authority for WRRB Recommendations:

Section 12.5.6 of the Tłıchq Agreement states:

The Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board may, without waiting for a proposal from a Party, make the following recommendations or determinations, after consulting with any Party or body with powers to manage any aspect of the subject matter of its recommendation or determination:

- (a) Recommend actions for management of harvesting in Wek'èezhì, including*
 - (i) A total allowable harvest level for any population or stock of fish,*
 - (ii) Harvest quotas for wildlife or limits as to location, methods, or seasons of harvesting wildlife, or*
 - (iii) The preparation of a wildlife management plan; ...*

The WRRB has chosen not to wait for ENR and TG to submit their predator management proposal to the Board later this spring. The 20% rate of annual decline of the kokètì ekwò and sahtì ekwò herds is in the Board's opinion so serious that waiting any longer to act will make recovery of the herds even more difficult. The Board is convinced that early action is essential.

In consideration of the updated 2018 sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herd estimates and recent consultations with Tłıchq communities the WRRB makes the recommendations set out below to GNWT and the TG:

Recommendation #1-2019 (Predator): The WRRB supports continuing the ENR's dìga harvest incentive program and the TG's Community Based Dìga Harvesting Project as an education tool.

Recommendation #2-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dìga monitoring be undertaken so that population estimates, or indexes are generated. In addition, as much information as possible, including condition, diet, and reproductive status, should be collected from each harvested dìga.

Recommendation #3-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dìga management be undertaken in Wek'èezhì. TG and ENR should review the "*Wolf Technical Feasibility Assessment: Options for Managing Wolves on the Range of the Bathurst Barren-ground Caribou Herd*" submitted in November 2017 to determine the most effective, humane and cost-efficient methods that would have the least impact and disturbance on the ekwò herds themselves.

Recommendation #4-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dìga management should be closely monitored for effectiveness of halting or slowing the decline of the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds in order to provide future harvesting opportunities.

Recommendation #5-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that the GNWT and TG work with the Government of Nunavut to enact predator management actions on the calving grounds of sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò in Nunavut.

Recommendation #6-2019 (Predator): The WRRB commits to striking a working group to begin work on a *sahcho* (grizzly bear) biological assessment by June 2019, specifically on the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds herd ranges. This working group will include at minimum the GNWT, TG and the Government of Nunavut. WRRB staff recommend that *sahcho* are monitored in order to determine if pressures are increasing on ekwò.

Recommendation #7-2019 (Predator): WRRB staff recommend that *golden det'qcho* (golden eagle) are monitored in order to determine if pressures of golden det'qcho are increasing on ekwò. WRRB staff recommends that TG and the GNWT work with the Government of Nunavut to support golden det'qcho monitoring.

In addition, as per Section 12.5.8 of the Tłıchq Agreement, the Board requests a response to these recommendations by March 6, 2019.

Conclusion:

The WRRB believes that predator management must begin by May 2019 in order to promote recovery of the herds. This action is essential to ensure the potential for a future harvest of sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò.

The WRRB will, in accordance with the Tłıchq Agreement participate in any consultations on these proposals that the ENR or TG decides to undertake.

If there are any questions, please contact our office at (867) 873-5740 or jpellissey@wrrb.ca.

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas, Chair
Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board

Cc Dr. Joe Dragon, Deputy Minister, ENR-GNWT
 Rita Mueller, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, ENR-GNWT
 Bruno Croft, Superintendent, North Slave Region, ENR-GNWT
 Laura Duncan, Tłıchq Executive Officer, TG
 Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director, Culture and Lands Protection, TG
 Michael Birlea, Manager, Culture and Lands Protection, TG



MAR 07 2019

Mr. Joseph Judas, Chair
Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board
4504 49TH AVENUE
YELLOWKNIFE NT X1A 1A7

Dear Mr. Judas:

Re: Section 12.5.6 of the Tłıchǫ Agreement – WRRB Predator Management Recommendations

Thank you for your letter dated February 6, 2019 providing the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board's (WRRB) recommendations to the Tłıchǫ Government (TG) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories.

TG and ENR are providing the attached joint response to the WRRB's recommendations.

Sincerely,

Grand Chief George Mackenzie
Tłıchǫ Government
Behchokò, NT

Robert C. McLeod, Minister
Environment and Natural Resources
Yellowknife, NT

Attachment

- c. Dr. Joe Dragon, Deputy Minister
Environment and Natural Resources

Ms. Rita Mueller, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations
Environment and Natural Resources

Dr. Brett Elkin, Director, Wildlife
Environment and Natural Resources

Mr. Bruno Croft, Superintendent, North Slave Region
Environment and Natural Resources

Ms. Laura Duncan, Tłıchǵ Executive Officer
Tłıchǵ Government

Ms. Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director, Culture and Lands Protection
Tłıchǵ Government

Mr. Michael Birlea, Manager, Culture and Lands Protection
Tłıchǵ Government

Ms. Jody Pellissey, Executive Director
Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

WRRB Predator Management Recommendations

Recommendation #1-2019 (Predator): The WRRB supports continuing the ENR's dīga harvest incentive program and the TG's Community Based Dīga Harvesting Project as an education tool.

Response:

ENR and TG accept this recommendation.

ENR thanks the WRRB for their support of the Enhanced North Slave Wolf Harvest Incentive Program and notes that the program will continue until the prime fur season for wolves ends on May 31.

TG acknowledges and thanks the WRRB for its support of the Tłıchq Community-Based Dīga Harvesting Project, which is still under development. Tłıchq elders have been key proponents for developing and implementing a training program for Tłıchq hunters to become knowledgeable and effective harvesters of dīga. The training program engages Tłıchq elders directly so that Tłıchq knowledge and practices for hunting dīga are maintained and transmitted to the next generation of hunters. TG staff are working with selected Tłıchq hunters to provide them with additional training on harvesting and skinning methods through workshops that will be held in collaboration with ENR.

Recommendation #2-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dīga monitoring be undertaken so that population estimates, or indexes are generated. In addition, as much information as possible, including condition, diet, and reproductive status, should be collected from each harvested dīga.

Response:

ENR and TG accept this recommendation. ENR and TG agree that important aspects for assessing wolf management actions will be to a) monitor the relative abundance of dīga based on indices as removal actions are undertaken and b) evaluate health and condition of dīga including age, sex, diet, and reproductive status.

ENR and TG will develop and pilot a protocol for monitoring relative abundance of dīga in an adaptive manner to evaluate feasibility of sampling and robustness of results.

For each wolf carcass ENR receives, basic data on age, sex, diet, and reproductive status will be collected.

Recommendation #3-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dīga management be undertaken in Wek'èezhìi. TG and ENR should review the “*Wolf Technical Feasibility Assessment: Options for Managing Wolves on the Range of the Bathurst Barren-ground Caribou Herd*” submitted in November 2017 to determine the most effective, humane and cost-efficient methods that would have the least impact and disturbance on the ekwò herds themselves.

Response:

ENR and TG accept this recommendation, and will use the feasibility assessment to develop the program.

ENR's Enhanced North Slave Wolf Incentive Program encourages harvesters to undertake ground-based shooting and/or snaring on the winter range of the Bluenose-East and Bathurst barren-ground caribou herds. The program is an extension of the previous program and was implemented to address requests from Indigenous hunters for further incentives to harvest wolves. This pilot project includes monitoring; ENR will track the number of dīga harvested and the observations of dīga reported by hunters as well as hunters' feedback on the logistics of harvesting dīga on the winter range. ENR will adaptively manage this program; if it is clear that this program is not resulting in a significant number of harvested dīga, enhancements will be made to the program and/or other options outlined in the feasibility assessment will be considered.

Recommendation #4-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that dīga management should be closely monitored for effectiveness of halting or slowing the decline of the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds in order to provide future harvesting opportunities.

Response:

ENR and TG accept this recommendation. ENR and TG are working together to develop management actions to help recover caribou and developing a joint proposal on dīga management. Monitoring will be included as part of the implementation of any wolf management program. At the same time, ENR and TG have proposed to increase the monitoring of both the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds as outlined in the *Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East ?ekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd: 2019-2021* and the *Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bathurst ?ekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd: 2019-2021*.

Recommendation #5-2019 (Predator): The WRRB recommends that the GNWT and TG work with the Government of Nunavut to enact predator management actions on the calving grounds of sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò in Nunavut.

Response:

As neither ENR nor TG have law-making jurisdiction in Nunavut we are unable to accept the recommendation as worded. ENR and TG would like to vary this recommendation, as the GNWT and TG can discuss potential predator management actions on the calving grounds of sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò with the Government of Nunavut.

Recommendation #6-2019 (Predator): The WRRB commits to striking a working group to begin work on a *sahcho* (grizzly bear) biological assessment by June 2019, specifically on the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds herd ranges. This working group will include at minimum the GNWT, TG and the Government of Nunavut. WRRB staff recommend that *sahcho* are monitored in order to determine if pressures are increasing on ekwò.

Response:

ENR and TG accept the first half of this recommendation. ENR and TG will participate in a collaborative process to work on a *sahcho* biological assessment led by WRRB staff. ENR can provide information on *sahcho* from the Northwest Territories. In April 2017, the Northwest Territories Species at Risk Committee released the “Species Status Report for Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) in the Northwest Territories”, which includes both traditional knowledge and science. This status report provides a thorough biological assessment of *sahcho* within the NWT and should form a basis for the biological assessment.

As neither ENR nor TG have jurisdiction in Nunavut we are unable accept the second half of this recommendation as worded. Despite this, ENR can discuss potential *sahcho* monitoring in order to determine if pressures are increasing on ekwò with the Government of Nunavut. ENR and TG recognize that *sahcho* are an important predator on the calving and post-calving grounds of ekwò. As the majority of the calving grounds and post-calving ranges of the sahtì ekwò and kokètì ekwò herds are in Nunavut, monitoring the pressures of *sahcho* on ekwò will occur in Nunavut and be the responsibility of the Government of Nunavut.

The TG Boots on the Ground program is one method of tracking *sahcho* on the Bathurst range and in the future on the Bluenose-East range. *Sahcho* have been observed during the TG Boots on the Ground program.

Recommendation #7-2019 (Predator): WRRB staff recommend that *golden det'qcho* (golden eagle) are monitored in order to determine if pressures of golden det'qcho are increasing on ekwò. WRRB staff recommends that TG and the GNWT work with the Government of Nunavut to support golden det'qcho monitoring.

Response:

As neither ENR nor TG have jurisdiction in Nunavut we are unable accept the recommendation as worded. ENR and TG would like to vary this recommendation, as TG and ENR can discuss potential options for monitoring both golden det'qcho and bald eagles with the Government of Nunavut.

ENR and TG recognize that eagles and in particular golden det'qcho have been identified as a significant predator of caribou calves in other barren-ground caribou herds.

The TG Boots on the Ground program is one method of tracking eagles on the Bathurst range and in the future on the Bluenose-East range. Bald eagles have been observed during the TG Boots on the Ground program.